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THE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL¹

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It is unnecessary to state that nothing new will be presented on the subject to be discussed informally this morning. As the years go by, however, experience must give us data from which we may gain light and change our course somewhat so as to come nearer the fulfilment of what we are striving for.

It is interesting to note attempted changes in educational nomenclature. In the '80's the Bureau of Education, through Dr. William T. Harris, commissioner of education, succeeded in bringing about the adoption of the threefold division of schools into elementary, secondary, and collegiate or technical. All felt certain that an advanced step had been taken. It is curious in listening to the conversation of teachers and to their addresses to note that the term "elementary" seems to have been generally adopted, that "secondary" has gone into the background, and that today we hear "high school" as commonly as before the term "secondary" was agreed upon.

It is also a matter of some importance to note the stress that has been laid upon the peculiarities of the high school and the secondary school as distinguished from each other. In the early '90's President Butler of Columbia wrote interestingly on the

¹ A stenographic report of an address delivered at the Twenty-second Educational Conference of the Academies and High Schools in Relations with the University of Chicago, November 20, 1909.

subject-matter of the curriculum in the high school; and also on the need of professional training for teachers in the high school. He took the broadest survey of the question of the education of boys and girls between the ages of thirteen and eighteen that had been made up to that time. He laid emphasis upon the necessity for training in ethics; for training that should be developed out of the experience and the life of those boys and girls. After we had crossed the line over into the present century, the president of Yale took a turn at this terminology, and wrote a rather interesting paper, some erroneous assumptions in which will form the basis of my remarks regarding the high school. President Hadley objected, as you probably all know, to placing the public high school under the term, secondary school; and he, by implication, opened the way for a quasi-acceptance of some defects in high-school work as inherent in the method and aim of that school. He laid stress upon the need for training to precision in thinking in the secondary school, assuming that the secondary school is limited to fitting boys and girls for college by means of a classical course. He did not say that precision is unnecessary in the broad course of the high school; but if precision in thinking and accuracy in speech are the prime requisites in training for college, and those requisites are made the basis for differentiation of secondary training from high-school training, then one is justified in saying that the implication is that the high school trains in a general way, but one must not expect when within its precincts to hear thought expressed accurately or to find the boys and girls thinking clearly and definitely. While it may be true that President Hadley did not intend to say anything so severe with regard to high-school work, yet one sometimes wonders whether it is not in accordance with fact that in our effort to give the boys and girls a slight acquaintance with every field of learning we do tend to develop a bird-like, flitting tendency in the minds and in the habits of thought and expression of those boys and girls.

That the high school certainly will evolve into a great school with many different courses is something that one may feel justified in predicting. In some cities such an evolution has

already taken place. In St. Louis every high school has a strictly classical course fitting for college and has many technical or, as some like to call them, vocational courses. In Chicago that evolution has taken place in a few of the high schools—about half of them. It is hoped that all high schools will eventually offer their students in all parts of the city a choice in a programme which will allow them to fit for this or that line of industry or commercial life, or for college or professional life. Care should be taken, however, to distinguish many courses of study from an excessive number of subjects in each course of study.

In discussing the high school in that article which appeared in the early part of this century, the writer did say that instead of being characterized by precision of thought and accuracy of language, the necessities of the case demanded that high-school courses should be marked by scope and flexibility; and while we with our fondness for breadth were greatly pleased with the idea of the work having scope and flexibility, we did not pause long enough to consider whether the mind that is dealing largely with scientific subjects or the mind that is dealing largely with commercial subjects, works, after all, in a different way in getting a grasp on its subject-matter from the mind that is working largely on the dead languages.

But there is a point on which after visiting many high schools within the last few months, high schools in different cities, I may say one is justified in criticizing the high school; everywhere there prevails the idea that our work must be so done that when the boys and the girls graduate they must be slightly in touch with every subject known to man, but they need not necessarily think and speak with continuity and exactness in any one of the multitude. The result has been that the work of the high school is not so fully or so thoroughly organized as was the work in the high school in the days when it was limited to the same branches to which President Hadley limits the secondary school. There is no doubt that the work in the organization of the classical courses has been more thoroughly done than as yet has the work in the vocational, industrial, and general courses.

It is with some hesitancy that I make my point with regard to what seems to me to be the desirable thing pertaining to the courses in the high school; and yet as this audience is composed entirely of those who are doing work in the higher fields of education, I must trust to being able to make myself understood so that I shall not be consigned to the category of drill mistress. In the elementary school there is nothing which frightens the teacher like the word "drill"—that is, a modern, up-to-date teacher. It has become dangerous to use the word, and I certainly can smile over the dangerous condition because I recall that I was one of the most ardent in the attempt to do away with the idea of drill, and I still deplore meaningless drill. In the high school the word "narrow," the narrow programme, the old narrow course of the high school, is as great a bugbear as is that word "drill" in the elementary school, and yet I believe that in order to place the high-school work on such a plane that the young men and young women graduating from that school shall go out with something of a technique in learning and in the use of that which they have learned, we must not reduce the number of courses offered, but we must reduce the number of subjects gathered in each course.

A mind, mature or immature, which prepares lessons in four or five different lines of study, day after day, fails of an intimacy with the movement of the subject-matter with which it is dealing; fails of knowing something of the motif that lies in that which has been marked out as a subject of study for boys and girls between thirteen and eighteen years of age. If we could plan our courses of study so that in each course there were three subjects upon which we expect the boys or girls to put all the intensity of power possible and then if there were a line of work which would be not so much for the training in precision of thought as for awakening them to the social environment and to the movements of society, and also for developing the artistic and aesthetic side of the nature, we should improve upon the marsh-like results of the present extensive study courses. In that fourth course intensive preparation should not be expected, but the type of work that arises naturally out of the genuine social,

intellectual intercourse between educated men and women on one hand and boys and girls of high-school age on the other should be the outcome.

There is a strange interpretation of the meaning of the development of the social life in the school. Many years ago, in talking with a number of teachers, I spoke at some length upon the necessity for developing the social life, the social method of attack in the schools. In going out I chanced to be behind two who had been present throughout the talk and I heard one say to the other: "I never supposed that Mrs. Young was so given over to dancing and card playing." When in the high school and in the elementary school one is told, "We are trying to do something for the social life and we manage to have them dance five minutes after luncheon," one wonders if we shall ever know what is meant by the development of the social life in the school. Young people should have the opportunity to dance, to have the light give-and-take in conversation, but there is a social life, there is a method of handling subject-matter with a class which develops all the social and co-operative powers the teacher and the children have. Recently in a class in algebra the teacher after assigning the lesson warned the boys and girls not to discuss the problems together and not to compare their answers. Will the day ever come when all through the length and breadth of this land, in the public schools at least, knowledge will be so manipulated, will be so treated that our boys and girls will work helpfully together instead of carrying their answers around in their pockets each almost hoping that nobody else has all of the correct answers? We are far away, as yet, from the idea of the social handling of the subject-matter when we are teaching. We are still endeavoring to see whether the slow ones know what all the others in the class know, deceiving ourselves by calling such endeavor stimulation of thought.

Our work in the high school, the flitting from subject to subject, has developed in this country a conspicuous vagueness in the use of language. All day long we hear the teachers in the high, and in the secondary school also, saying: "What do you mean?" "Who understands what he is trying to say?" "Does anyone

understand that?" What does it mean? It means that there has not been intensity of interest in the material which is going to be threshed out in the class, and that the mind of the student is not inquisitive about the subject-matter and desirous of tracing what it has grasped and what it asks, all in language so clear that teacher and classmates will understand and work on the problem as put before them. Is there any other explanation of this constant effort to secure from boys and girls between thirteen and twenty years of age a correct, a fair, a plain statement of what they have in mind?

In the laboratory (and the laboratory was going to save us, we thought, when it was introduced) one finds an indefiniteness in the scientific attitude comparable to the vagueness of language in academic subjects. Along with the work in the laboratory, there would be, on the social side, the coming together of two or more persons to see how the experiments have differed, or wherein they have resembled each other, how they have worked out; undoubtedly, there would be conversation about results. In walking about leisurely in the science laboratories here and there as the experiment in physics or chemistry is progressing, one gathers bits of information about the party which the student attended the evening before or the parties which the other students are going to attend that evening. This sort of playing with the work is an indefiniteness in the treatment of science that will never develop a scientific attitude of thought which the boys and girls should acquire in the high-school laboratories. If they have not that attitude, the school fails of its purpose.

Let us turn to the arts: recently a teacher of manual training in a high school said that he almost wished the boys might come to him without having done any work in manual training in the elementary school. When asked what he thought was the cause of his dissatisfaction, he said: "They come here without caring whether the work is exact or not. They play with the tools." There is something worth considering in his reply, and yet one wonders if there is a lack of educational insight in the mind that deals with advanced boys and girls, if it has never made a study of the method of approach to learning by younger

children. Thirty years ago many of the teachers of German in the high schools said that they usually placed in the same entering class pupils who had studied German four years in the elementary school and children who had never studied a word of German, and that in three months one would not know them apart. Latin was taught in the elementary schools for a time and the children studied Latin two years and enjoyed it and the teachers enjoyed it. Later when these children entered the high school they were told that now they would begin at the beginning and learn Latin. It seems to be the case that when we get over into the arts, or into the languages, we find the same conditions. What is it that causes this imperfection? Has the idea of great scope and flexibility without precision and accuracy extended down into the lower schools? Is it possible that in changing from beginning with the deductive to beginning with the inductive method we have forgotten that the process includes induction *and* deduction, not induction *or* deduction? It seems as if this is a diatribe against the teacher. It is not a diatribe, not even a jeremiad, but an endeavor to study out as one goes about in the high schools in Chicago and elsewhere the cause of our difficulty. Is it that one is expecting too much? No; it cannot be that, because President Hadley said that in the secondary schools we should develop precision of thought and accuracy in the use of language, and one knows that the boys and girls in the general and vocational courses in the high schools have minds of as fine a type as those who are engaged in preparing for college. Therefore there arises the necessity for trying to see what can be the cause of indefiniteness in the laboratories; vagueness in the language; imperfection in the manual and industrial arts, and crudity in art itself.

Is there nothing definite for which we can aim? Must accuracy rest on the old drill of the old drill-master? Is there not something all along the line that can be acquired by minds and known in its entirety and with accuracy up to the point to which that mind attains? That is the question which confronts one who goes about through the high school seeing the work done in it. Our high school is an absolute essential to this

country and it is to the glory of the high school that it is drawing more and more of the children from all ranks in life, and that among the poorest people there is every effort made to keep the boy and the girl in school until a high-school education shall have been secured. As one recognizes with appreciation the great things accomplished by the high school, one longs at the same time for that *more* which President Hadley would give to the secondary school as its peculiar birthright. To secure that *more* the number of subjects should be reduced; the programme of studies should be less pretentious.

Three weeks ago I was in the East visiting at the house of a friend, an inventor, a man who probably knows his subject better than anyone in this room, even though that one may teach the subject. In conversation I spoke of the great advance made in the methods of teaching. And while speaking of some of the defects of the young folks, I said, "The young girl has a better balanced view of life when she graduates from the high or the normal school today than the young girl had when I graduated; and I think if you would look back you would say the same about the boys." "Well," he said, "That all may be." Then he called his daughter who is in the third year of a private secondary school, and asked her to bring the work on physics which she was studying. She brought it and he said: "Look at that book. It should take years to compass what is in it and she is going through the whole this year. And," he added, "that is not the worst of it. She is not getting at things, but she is perfectly satisfied, because when her teacher tries her on the printed page she answers satisfactorily all the questions put to her." Then he turned to a cut on his own subject and said, "Will you explain that to me? It is wrong, but when I started to explain to E. that it was wrong and wherein, she said, 'Oh, don't mix me up. I have learned that lesson.' "

One more point should be made here: The period of recitation should be lengthened. The number of subjects carried simultaneously by boys and girls, ranging from twelve or thirteen to seventeen or eighteen years of age, should be reduced and the period of recitation lengthened. An onlooker watching the

boys and girls in class learns to know when the time is approaching to flit to something else. There begin to be evidences of a feverish weariness with the old and a desire for a new stimulus. After thirty minutes the young students call for new stimulus. When they finish high-school work and go out into life one fears, as one sees them becoming restive after thirty minutes, that they, too, in the outer world will be harassed by the same feverish longings for change that harass you and me.

Emerson says: "Life is a search for power." At first thought one might suppose he means a search for money, high position. But further thought brings a full realization of the larger view that it is a search to get control of the self, and to use one's endowments for the benefit not only of the self but of the family and the friends, the community in which one works. Are we bearing this in mind as we teach from day to day and hear coming from our own lips, "No, you are wrong. What did you say? Sit down. Who can answer my question?" Close upon these utterances of ours, do we hear the refrain, "Life is a search for power, and these boys and girls are striving for and acquiring that power as they work with me"?

Turning to the topic of the teacher in the high school, let me confess to an overwhelming sense of having undertaken to discuss an almost non-discussable question. I purpose taking up only one point on the subject of the teacher. You will bear me out, I presume, in saying that after the qualifications of individuals have been discussed the question which is most in evidence today in the high school is the question of men teachers versus women teachers; I have looked at the women with a good deal of interest and I have looked at the men too with a good deal of interest, in my visits. I have been trying to make out why the question is so common, and also to answer the question which is of far deeper importance: Are the women of any special value in the high school?

One thing gives me great pleasure. It is that the women who are entering the ranks as high-school teachers have a surer basis for their training in their subjects than was the case when the high-school principal, if a woman teacher was assigned to the

school, felt that she was so weak in everything that the best way to strengthen her would be to have her teach a class in each department in the school. As the women are beginning to teach subjects in which they are well prepared, they are showing the value of their college training: and, as an older woman looking at the younger women starting out in life, it is with gratification that I have observed the surety of the intellectual grasp of most of the young women in handling subject-matter in their classes—I call any woman young who is below fifty. However, one thing disturbs me. Time, I presume, with the great influx of women into the high school and college as teachers will remedy this. If I understand the idea of a school having the atmosphere of a well-bred social community, there must be something that men teachers as men contribute and something that women teachers as women contribute. I do not mean to say that there are a masculine mathematics and a feminine mathematics. Two points will determine the direction of a line just as certainly in the feminine mind as in the masculine mind; but sometimes I think it is unfortunate that the school is not receiving so much from the addition of women as a class to the teaching corps in the high school as it should receive; the trouble lies in the condition that intellectually the women are men-trained. We all accept complacently the slap that the man gives—we have not got beyond that yet—but when a woman gives a slap, another condition confronts us. The principal of a high school said to me this week, “If a man teacher makes a girl mad the girl gets over it within twenty-four hours; but if a woman teacher makes her mad, the girl never gets over it.” I suppose there is something in his wholesale condemnation of the influence of women teachers. I don’t need to work it out with you. There is something of the man teacher in the intellectual attitude of some women teachers who are men-trained, but time will change this, when we have more women teaching in college, and they are women with sufficient force to be women in their bearing, not imitators of a certain type of man.

You must bear with me in order that I may make myself plain in this matter and must let me speak of two teachers I have

seen within this week. One was a woman teaching mathematics, and the atmosphere was most charming. It was mathematics that she taught and yet when the boy floundered and stumbled around in his demonstration it was a woman, a well-bred woman from the foundation up, who dealt with him and held him to his proposition until his mind worked at it with what he knew. Then again I was in a class in science. In other classes I had heard the laugh of counterfeited glee which often painfully mars a school whose student body is composed largely of girls and its teaching corps largely of men—the laugh that assures the teacher that his wit is remarkable and at the same time assures the butt of the wit that it isn't worth while to be disturbed, that the girls sympathize with the classmate. From a class in which I heard the laugh of counterfeited glee I went into a class in science, and may I never forget that class. I spoke of the other teacher as the woman, well bred, knowing and caring for the boys and girls under her instruction and influence. Here in the science room I was conscious of an atmosphere generated by a well-bred man, who was personally interested in the boys and girls. There was the indescribable difference between the man and the woman, but here too the atmosphere of the room was blessed. The young people were serious and happy in their work, dealing with the subject thoroughly, keenly. They were sincere through and through. What was it? I cannot tell you. I know that in one case it was the personality of a noble woman, and in the other, the personality of a noble man, that made life pure and holy. I thought how great it is for these boys and these girls to come under the indescribable influence that emanates from that woman and from that man.